

1. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1. Purpose of Action

On December 2, 2002, Idaho Power Company (Idaho Power) filed an application for a rights-of-way (ROW) grant with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the continued operation and maintenance of five existing transmission lines—three 230 kilovolt (kV) lines and two 345 kV lines (Table 1-1). The purpose of this action is to authorize the continued transmission of electricity across rights-of-way on federal lands administered by the BLM and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). Such authorization will ensure the reliable supply of electrical power while maintaining a harmonious relationship with adjoining land uses and the environment. The transmission lines extend across approximately 283 mi of federal land, 276 mi on BLM, 7 mi on BOR, and 1 mi on Army Corp of Engineers (COE). The COE, through a categorical exclusion, will issue a separate ROW outgrant. The transmission lines are located in Ada, Elmore, Gooding, Twin Falls, Lincoln, Jerome, Minidoka, Blaine, and Power counties of Idaho, approximately between the towns of Boise and American Falls (Figure 1-1). The Boise Bench to Midpoint #1 and Midpoint to Borah #1 lines were built in 1950; the Boise Bench to Midpoint #2 and Midpoint to Borah #2 lines were built in 1961; and the Boise Bench to Midpoint #3 line was built in 1966. Collectively, these lines are referred to as the Boise to Borah lines.

In essence, this is an administrative action, since the lines exist and no modifications to transmission-line infrastructure are proposed. Idaho Power proposes to expand the right-of-way for the Midpoint to Borah #1 line from the existing 80 ft to 150 ft to meet current National Electric Safety Code (NESC) reliability standards, and reduce the ROW for the Boise Bench to Midpoint #2 and #3 lines from 150 ft to 100 ft.

Table 1-1. BLM Resource Areas, line lengths, and ROW width for the Boise-to-Borah transmission lines.

Line No. ¹	Line Name	BLM Resource Areas	Line Length on BLM Lands (mi)	Line Length on other Federal Lands ² (mi)	Total Line Length (mi)	ROW Width ³ (ft)
902	Boise Bench to Midpoint #1 – 230 kV	Four Rivers, Jarbidge, Shoshone	57.4	0.8	108	80
906	Boise Bench to Midpoint #2 – 230 kV	Four Rivers, Jarbidge, Shoshone	53.9	0.5	105	100
912	Boise Bench to Midpoint #3 – 230 kV	Four Rivers, Jarbidge, Shoshone	75.0	2.4	107	100
950	Midpoint to Brady #1– 345 kV	Shoshone, Burley	45.1	0.5	79	150
951	Midpoint to Borah #2 – 345 kV	Shoshone, Burley	44.7	3.5	78	150

¹ Line numbers may change when no longer licensed with a FERC project.

² Other federal lands include those administered by the BOR and COE.

³ Width of rights-of-way for the Proposed Action.

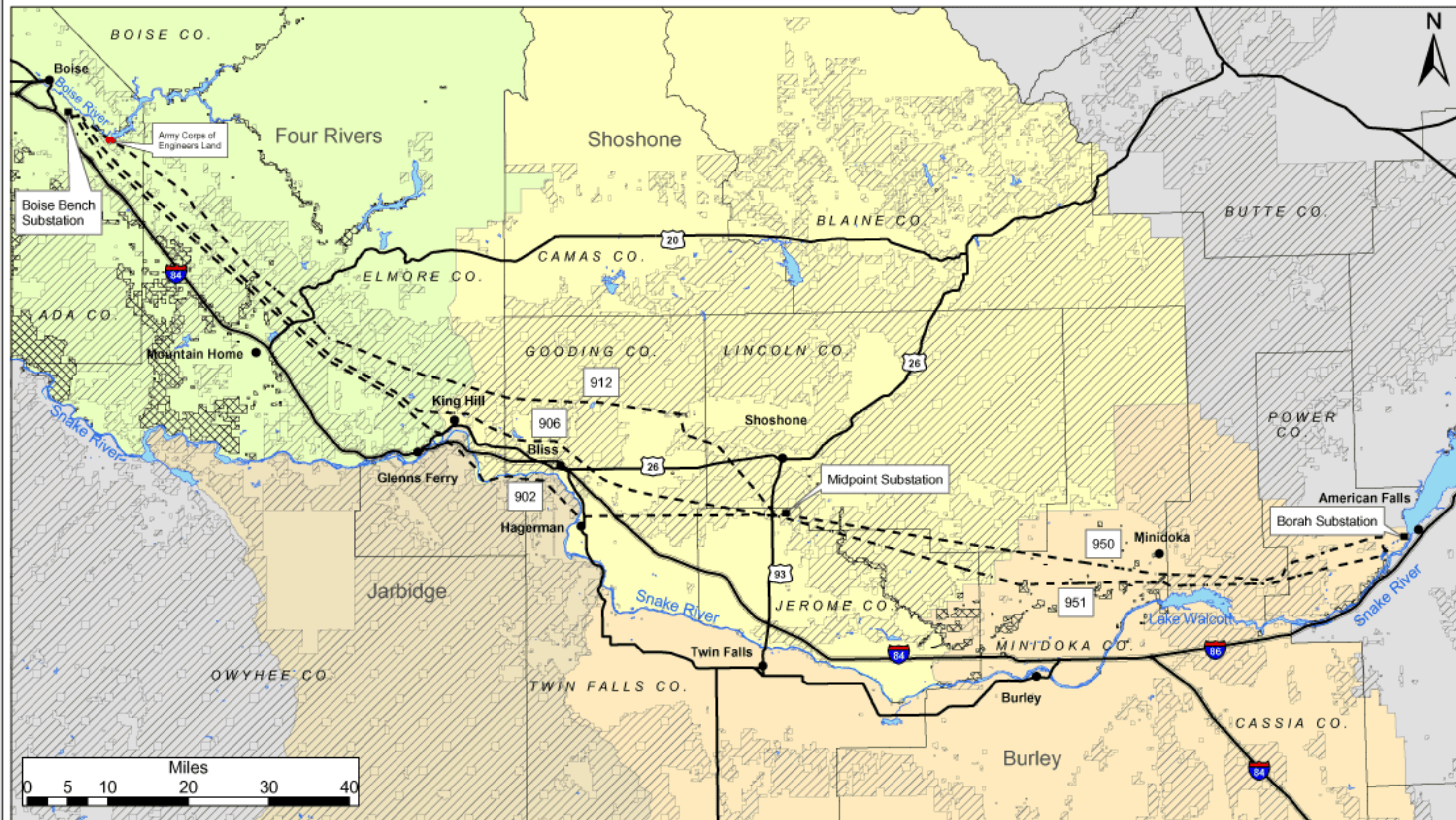
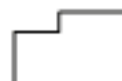


Figure 1-1. Idaho Power Boise to Borah Transmission Lines Project Area.

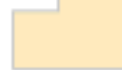


Bureau of Land Management
Lands

Bureau of Reclamation Lands



Counties



Bureau of Land Management
Field Offices, various colors



Project Transmission Lines



Interstate Highways



U.S. Highways

Line No.	Line Name
902	Boise Bench to Midpoint # 1
906	Boise Bench to Midpoint # 2
912	Boise Bench to Midpoint # 3
950	Midpoint to Brady # 1
951	Midpoint to Brady # 2

1.2. Need for Action

Idaho Power's need to transfer the ROW authorization from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to the appropriate federal agency arose from a decision by the FERC that the Boise Bench to Midpoint #1 and Midpoint to Borah #1 are not primary lines. Thus these lines are not under the jurisdiction of the FERC and would not be included in the new license for the Bliss Hydroelectric Project (FERC Project No. 1975). Since construction, these lines have been licensed as part of the Bliss Project. The ROW for these lines were granted under a Federal Power Act (FPA) withdrawal. This action will continue to satisfy domestic and business demands for electrical power, allow for economic growth, and provide for national security.

Pursuant to Section 4(e) of the FPA, the Commission licenses "dams, water conduits, reservoirs, powerhouses, transmission lines, or other project works necessary or convenient for the development, transmission, and utilization of power..." FPA Section 3(11) defines a "project" as including "the primary line or lines transmitting power therefrom to the point of junction with distribution system or with interconnected primary transmission system." The test applied by the Commission to define what is a "primary transmission line" for FPA Part I purposes is that primary lines are:

"...those necessary to ensure the 'viability' of the project in the event of Federal takeover. If a line is "used solely to transmit power from [Commission] licensed projects to load centers," and if, without it "there would be no way to market the full capacity of the project, then that line is primary to the project."

The three additional lines (Boise Bench to Midpoint #2 and #3, Midpoint to Borah #2) are currently licensed under Idaho Power's Hells Canyon Hydroelectric Project (FERC Project No. 1971). Idaho Power expects that the FERC will determine that these lines are not primary lines, and will not be included in a new license. Permitting these Bliss and Hells Canyon Project lines together, given the common project area and issues involved, would result in administrative and operational efficiencies.

1.3. Project Objectives

1.3.1. Provide for Safe and Reliable Transmission of Electricity

Electric utilities are charged by state and federal regulatory agencies with the responsibility to provide safe, reliable electric service to their customers. Customers may include homeowners, businesses, factories, municipalities, government, and other utilities. Electricity is essential for domestic use, economic growth, providing for national security, and other vital services.

Idaho Power maintains its transmission lines to ensure the structural and engineering integrity of the system. Providing safe, reliable power to customers requires an effective and timely operation and maintenance (O&M) program. This must be accomplished, to the greatest extent

possible, while maintaining a harmonious relationship with adjoining land uses and the environment.

1.3.2. Minimize Impacts to the Environment and Conduct Operation and Maintenance in a Manner that Complies with BLM Land-Use Plans

It is intended that project related O&M activities minimize impacts to the environment and comply with BLM land-use plans and other applicable environmental laws and policies. Specific objectives related to this include:

- Define approved work areas
- Conduct road maintenance as necessary to minimize direct and indirect impacts to resources
- Minimize potential impacts of vegetation clearing within the rights-of-way
- Rehabilitate disturbed areas
- Minimize the spread of noxious weeds
- Protect streams and associated riparian and wetland habitats
- Protect federally listed and Idaho BLM sensitive plant species
- Protect federally listed and Idaho BLM sensitive wildlife species and their habitat
- Protect cultural resources
- Minimize aesthetic impacts of the project

1.4. Authorizations, Permits, Reviews and Approvals

The BLM has administrative responsibilities on the public lands where the transmission-line ROW and related facilities are located. Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) (43 U.S.C. 1761), as amended, authorizes the granting and renewing of rights-of-way crossing public lands administered by the BLM. The BOR's authorities stem from the Act of Congress June 17, 1902 (ch. 1093, 32 Stat. 388; 43 U.S.C. 391), and acts amendatory thereof or supplementary thereto, particularly Sec. 10 of the 1939 Reclamation Project Act (43 U.S.C. 485), all of which acts are commonly referred to as the Federal Reclamation Laws. The BLM and BOR will collectively be referred to as "the Agencies". Table 1-2 documents the federal agency approvals, reviews, and permitting requirements for the project.

Table 1-2. Federal authorizations, permits, reviews, and approvals required for the project.

Action Requiring Permit, Approval, or Review	Permit/Approval	Accepting Authority/ Approving Agency	Statutory Reference
Right-of-Way (ROW) over land under federal management	ROW Grant	BLM	FLPMA 1976 (PL94-579) USC 1761-1771 and 43 CFR 2800
		BOR	Act of Congress June 17, 1902 (ch. 1093, 32 Stat. 388: 43 USC sec. 391), <i>and</i> Sec. 10 of the 1939 Reclamation Project Act (ch. 418, 53 Stat. 1187; USC sec 485)
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance to grant ROW	Environmental Assessment (EA)	BLM, BOR	NEPA, CEO 40 CFR Park 1500-et.seq.
Grant of ROW	Endangered Species Act compliance by BLM and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	USFWS	Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation
Grant of ROW	National Historic Preservation Act Compliance Section 106	BLM, as lead agency, and State Historic Preservation Office	National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 36 CFR part 800, 16 USC 47

1.4.1. Consistency with Management Plans

Boise-to-Borah transmission lines traverse four BLM planning areas (Figure 1-1). The proposed project falls within the jurisdiction of the following BLM resource management plans (RMP) and management framework plans (MFP):

- Kuna MFP (USDI 1983)—Boise Bench to Midpoint #1, #2, and #3
- Jarbidge RMP (USDI 1987)—Boise Bench to Midpoint #1, #2, and #3
- Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP (USDI 1976)—Boise Bench to Midpoint #2 and #3
- Monument RMP (USDI 1985)—Boise Bench to Midpoint #1, #2, and #3 and Midpoint to Borah #1 and #2

The proposed project conforms to all of the BLM land-use plans described above.

1.5. Decision to be Made

The Agencies must decide if they are going to issue a grant for the rights-of-way and, if so, what conditions would be included in the grant issued. In doing so, the Agencies must comply with requirements promulgated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (as amended), as well as other federal laws (Table 1-2).

This Environmental Assessment (EA) presents an analysis of the potential environmental impacts on federal lands that may result from implementation of the Proposed Action. The deciding officer would also determine if the proposed action is a “major federal action” requiring the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) by assessing the significance of the Proposed Actions based on context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27). Issuing a new grant for the ROW would allow Idaho Power to continue to operate and maintain the transmission lines for the duration of the new grant term.

1.6. Scoping

Several issues were identified as a result of BLM interdisciplinary team discussions, consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), tribal consultations, and Idaho Power. Key issues identified are assessed throughout the analysis of effects. Details relating to alternatives considered for this Project are included in Chapter 2.

1.6.1. Key Issues to be Addressed

As a result of the scoping process for the Project, the BLM identified several key issues to be analyzed in detail in the EA. These key issues are summarized below and discussed in more detail in Chapter 3—Affected Environment and Chapter 4—Environmental Consequences.

Cultural Resources

Federal agencies are required to consider the effects of the proposed undertaking on historic properties, which include archaeological and historical sites. Historic and pre-historic cultural resources occur in the project area. Idaho Power’s O&M activities, especially those involving ground disturbance, potentially could impact the integrity of cultural resources. In addition, traditional cultural properties, if identified by Native American tribes, could be at risk due to O&M activities.

Sensitive Plant Resources

The USFWS reported two proposed or listed plant species either known to occur or that have the potential to occur in the vicinity of the proposed project (Table 1-3). Ute ladies’-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*) is listed as threatened and slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*) is currently proposed for listing as endangered. BLM is obligated to protect listed species and determine if its actions are likely to affect these species.

In addition to federally listed species, the BLM maintains a list of sensitive species that it must consider when making management decisions. Plant species on the BLM sensitive species list that have the potential to occur in the transmission-line ROW are presented in Chapter 3. Idaho Power O&M activities could directly or indirectly impact these species.

Individuals or populations of these species could be trampled by vehicles or personnel, dug up, or otherwise impacted during ground disturbing O&M activities. These species could be secondarily affected by impacts to site productivity. For example, O&M activities potentially

may cause soil compaction, accelerated erosion, or introduce noxious weeds that could competitively exclude sensitive species.

Sensitive Wildlife Resources

The USFWS reported 15 animal species on their project species list (Table 1-3). BLM is obligated to protect listed species and determine if its actions are likely to affect these species. Of the reported species, 8 are either known to occur or have the potential to occur in the vicinity of the project: gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), Utah Valvata snail (*Valvata utahensis*), Bliss Rapids snail (*Taylorconcha serpenticola*), Idaho springsnail (*Pyrgulopsis idahoensis*), Banbury Springs limpet (*Lanx* spp.), and Snake River physa snail (*Physa natricina*). Gray wolves are concentrated well to the north of the project area, however they may incidentally stray near the Boise Bench to Midpoint #3 line, the northern-most transmission line. Bald eagles winter in the project area. Disturbance from O&M activities, either directly to the birds or indirectly to roosting or perching habitat, could impact this species. Although very small portions of the project area represent historical habitat for the yellow-billed cuckoo, no observations of the birds have been reported in the project area. However, impacts from O&M activities do have the potential to limit habitat critical to the reestablishment of the species. The five snail species, which occur in the Snake River or are associated with springs in the Snake River canyon, are in the vicinity of the four river crossings of the Boise Bench to Midpoint #1 line. Several other species included on the USFWS species list were determined to not be in the project area. Thus, the Proposed Action would have no effect on these species (Table 1-3), and are not considered further in this EA.

Table 1-3. USFWS listed species from the BLM Four Rivers, Jarbidge, Burley, and Shoshone Field Office 90-Day Species Lists, dated January 4, 2003.

Species	Latin Name	Listing Status ¹	Project Area Determination ²
Mammals			
Gray wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	XN	Potential to occur
Canada lynx	<i>Lynx canadensis</i>	T	Not present
Northern Idaho ground squirrel	<i>Spermophilus brunneus brunneus</i>	T	Not present
Southern Idaho ground squirrel	<i>Spermophilus brunneus endemicus</i>	C	Not present
Birds			
Bald eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	T	Occurs
Yellow-billed cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	C	Potential to occur
Fishes			
Bull trout	<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>	T	Not present
Bull trout	<i>Salvelinus confluentus</i>	PCH	Not present
Amphibians			
Columbia spotted frog	<i>Rana pretiosa</i>	C	Not present
Invertebrates			
Utah Valvata snail	<i>Valvata utahensis</i>	E	Occurs
Bliss Rapids snail	<i>Taylorconcha serpenticola</i>	T	Occurs
Idaho springsnail	<i>Pyrgulopsis idahoensis</i>	E	Occurs
Banbury Springs limpet	<i>Lanx spp.</i>	E	Potential to occur
Snake River Physa snail	<i>Physa natricina</i>	E	Occurs
Bruneau hot spring snail	<i>Pyrgulopsis bruneauensis</i>	E	Not present
Plants			
Slickspot peppergrass	<i>Lepidium papilliferum</i>	PE	Potential to occur
Ute ladies'-tresses	<i>Spiranthes diluvialis</i>	T	Potential to occur

¹ Listing status: E=endangered, T=threatened, C=candidate, PE=proposed as endangered, XN=experimental population, PCH=proposed critical habitat

² Project area is defined as the transmission-line rights-of-way, which vary from 80-150 ft.

In addition to federally listed species, the BLM maintains a list of sensitive species that it must consider when making management decisions. The BLM list for plant and animal species that have the potential to occur in the transmission-line ROW is presented in Chapter 3. Idaho Power O&M activities could directly or indirectly impact these species. These species could be disturbed or killed by O&M activities, or habitat could be impacted and thus no longer support the species during one or more periods of its life cycle.